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Ho-de-no-son-ne or New Confederacy of the Iroquois, by Henry R. Schoolcraft and W. H. C. Hosmer

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Title: An Address, Delivered Before the Was-ah Ho-de-no-son-ne or New Confederacy of the Iroquois
Also, Genundewah, a Poem

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AN
ADDRESS,
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
WAS-AH HO-DE-NO-SON-NE
OR
NEW CONFEDERACY OF THE IROQUOIS,
BY
HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT,
A MEMBER:
AT ITS THIRD ANNUAL COUNCIL,
AUGUST 14, 1845.

ALSO,
GENUNDEWAH,
A POEM,
BY
W. H. C. HOSMER,
A MEMBER:
PRONOUNCED ON THE SAME OCCASION.
PUBLISHED BY THE CONFEDERACY.

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1846.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN:

In a country like ours, whose institutions rest on the popular will, we must rely for our social and literary means and honors, exclusively on personal exertions, springing from the bosom of society. We have no external helps and reliances, sealed in expectations of public patronage, held by the hands of executive, or ministerial power. Our ancestors, it is true, were accustomed to such stimulants to literary exertions. Titles and honors were the prerogatives of Kings, who sometimes stooped from their political eminences, to bestow the reward upon the brows of men, who had rendered their names conspicuous in the fields of science and letters. Such is still the hope of men of letters in England, Germany and France. But if a bold and hardy ancestry, who had learned the art of thought in the bitter school of experience, were accustomed to such dispensations of royal favors, while they remained in Europe, they feel but little benefit from them here; and made no provision for their exercise, as one of the immunities of powers, when they came to set up the frame of a government for themselves.

No ruler, under our system, is invested with authority to tap, his kneeling fellow subject on the crown of his head, and exclaim, "Arise, Sir, Knight!" The cast of our institutions is all the other way, and the tendency of things, as the public mind becomes settled and compacted, is, to take away from men the prestige of names and titles; to award but little, on the score of antiquarian merit, and to weigh every man's powers and abilities, political and literary, in the scale of absolute individual capacity, to be judged of, by the community at large. If there are to be any "orders," in America, let us hope they will be like that, whose institution we are met to celebrate, which is founded on the principle of intellectual emulation, in the fields of history, science and letters.

Such are, indeed, the objects which bring us together on the present occasion, favored as we are in assembling around the light of this emblematic COUNCIL FIRE. Honored by your notice, as an honorary member, in your young institution, I may speak of it, as if I were myself a fellow laborer, in your circle: and, at least, as one, understanding somewhat of its plan, who feels a deep interest in its success.

Adopting one of the seats of the aboriginal powers, which once cast the spell of its simple, yet complicated, government, over the territory, a central point has been established HERE. To this central point, symbolizing the whole scheme of the Iroquois system, other points of subcentralization tend, as so many converging lines. You come from the east and the west, the north and the south. You have obeyed ONE impulse—followed ONE principle—come to unite your energies in ONE object. That object is the cultivation of letters. To give it force and distinctness, by which it may be known and distinguished among the efforts made to improve and employ the leisure hours of the young men of Western New York, you have adopted a name derived from the ancient confederacy of the Iroquois, who once occupied this soil. With the name, you have taken the general system of organization of society, within a society, held together by one bond. That bond, as existing in the TOTEMIC tie, reaches, with a peculiar force, each individual, in such society. It is an idea noble in itself, and worthy of the thought and care, by which it has been nurtured and moulded into its present auspicious form.—The union you thus form, is a union of minds. It is a band of brotherhood, but a brotherhood of letters. It is a confederacy of tribes, but a literary confederacy. It is an assemblage of warriors, but the labor to be pursued is exclusively of an intellectual character. The plumes with which you aim to pledge your literary arrows, are to be plucked from the wings of science. It is a council of clans, not to consult on the best means of advancing historical research; of promoting antiquarian knowledge; and of cultivating polite literature. The field of inquiry is broad, and it is to be trodden in various ways. You seek to advance in the paths of useful knowledge, but neglect not the flowers that bedeck the way. You aim at general objects and results, but pursue them, through the theme and story of that proud and noble race of the sons of the Forest, whose name, whose costume and whose principles of association you assume. Symbolically, you re-create the race. Thus aiming, and thus symbolizing your labors, your objects to resuscitate and exhume from the dust of by-gone years, some of those deeds of valor and renown which marked this hardy and vigorous race. There is in the idea of your association, one of the elements of a peculiar and national literature. And whatever may be the degree of success, which characterizes your labors, it is hoped they will bear the impress of American heads and American hearts. We have drawn our intellectual sustenance, it is true, from noble fountains and crystal streams. We have all England, and all Europe for our fountain head. But when this has been said, we must add, that they have been off-sets from foreign fountains and foreign streams. And nurtured as we have been, from such ample sources, it is time, in the course of our national developments, that we begin to produce something characteristic of the land that gave us birth. No people can bear a true nationality, which does not exfoliate, as it were, from its bosom, something that expresses the peculiarities of its own soil and climate. In building its intellectual edifice, we must have not only suitable decorations, but there must come from the broad and deep quarries of its own mountains, foundation stones, and columns and capitals, which bear the impress of an indigenous mental geognosy.

And where! when we survey the length and breadth of the land, can a more suitable element, for the work be found, than is furnished by the history and antiquities and institutions and love, of the free, bold, wild, independent, native hunter race? They are, relatively to us, what the ancient Pict and Celt were to Britain, or the Teuton, Goth and Magyar to Continental Europe. Looking around, over the wide forests, and transcendent lakes of New York, the founders of this association, have beheld the

footprints of the ancient race. They saw here, as it were, in vision, the lordly Iroquois, crowned by the feathers of the eagle, bearing in his hand the bow and arrows, and scorning, as it were, by the keen glances of his black eye, and the loftiness of his tread, the very earth that bore him up. History and tradition speak of the story of this ancient race.—They paint him as a man of war—of endurance—of indomitable courage—of capacity to endure tortures without complaint—of a heroic and noble independence. They tell us that these precincts, now waving with yellow corn, and smiling with villages, and glittering with spires, were once vocal with their war songs, and resounded with the chorusses of their corn feasts. We descry, as we plough the plain, the well chipped darts which pointed their arrows, and the elongated pestles, that crushed their maize. We exhume from their obliterated and simple graves, the pipe of steatite, in which they smoked, and offered incense to these deities, and the fragments of the culinary vases, around which, the lodge circle gathered to their forest meal. Mounds and trenches and ditches, speak of the movement of tribe against tribe, and dimly shadow forth the overthrow of nations. There are no plated columns of marble; no tablets of inscribed stone—no gates of rust-coated brass. But the MAN himself survives, in his generation. He is a WALKING STATUE before us. His looks and his gestures and his language remain. And he is himself, an attractive *monument* to be studied. Shall we neglect him, and his antiquarian vestiges, to run after foreign sources of intellectual study? Shall we toil amid the ruins of Thebes and Palmyra, while we have before us the monumental enigma of an unknown race? Shall philosophical ardor expend itself, in searching after the buried sites of Nineveh, and Babylon and Troy, while we have not attempted, with decent research, to collect, arrange and determine, the leading data of our aboriginal history and antiquities?—These are inquiries, which you, at least, may aim to answer.

No branch of the human family is an object unworthy of high philosophic inquiry. Their food, their language, their arts, their physical peculiarities, and their mental traits, are each topics of deep interest, and susceptible of being converted into evidences of high importance. Mistaken our Red Men clearly were, in their theories and opinions on many points. They were wretched theologists, and poor casuists. But not more so, in three-fourths of their dogmas, than the disciples of Zoroaster, or Confucius. They were polytheists from their very position. And yet, there is a general idea, that under every form, they acknowledged but one DIVINE INTELLIGENCE under the name of the GREAT SPIRIT.

They paid their sacrifices, or at least, respects, to the imaginary and phantastic gods of the air, the woods and water, as Greece and Rome had done, and done as blindly before them. But they were a vigorous, hardy and brave off-shoot of the original race of man. They were full of humanities. They had many qualities to command admiration. They were wise in council, they were eloquent in the defence of their rights. They were kind and humane to the weak, bewildered and friendless. Their lodge-board was ever ready for the way farer. They were constant to a proverb, in their *professed* friendships. They never forgot a kind act. Nor can it be recorded, to their dispraise, that they were a terror to their enemies. Their character was formed on the military principle, and to acquire distinction in this line, they roved over half the continent. They literally carried their conquests from the gulf of St. Lawrence to the gulf of Mexico. Few nations have ever existed, who have evinced more indomitable courage or hardihood, or shown more devotion to the spirit of independence than the Iroquois.

But all their efforts would have ended in disappointment, had it not been for that principle of confederation, which, at an early day, pervaded their councils, and converted them into a phalanx, which no other tribe could successfully penetrate, or resist. It is this trait, by which they are most distinguished from the other hunter nations of North America; and it is to their rigid adherence to the verbal compact, which bound them together, as tribes and clans, that they owe their present celebrity, and owed their former power.

It is proposed to inquire into the principles of this confederacy, and to make a few brief suggestions on its origin and history. In the time that has been given me, I have had but little opportunity for research, and even this little, other engagements, have not permitted me, fully to employ. The little that I have to offer, would indeed have been confined to the reminiscence of former reading, had I not been called, the present season, to make a personal visit to the reservation still occupied by the principal tribes.

1. Prominent in its effects on the rise and progress of nations, in the geographical diameter of the country they occupy. And in this respect, the Iroquois were singularly favored. They lived under an atmosphere the most genial of any in the temperate latitude. Equally free from the extremes of heat, and humidity, it has been found eminently favorable to human life. Inquiries into the statistics of vitality will abundantly denote this. Many of the civil sachems lived to a great age. And the same may be said of those warriors who escaped the dart and club, until they came to the period, not a very advanced one, when they ceased to follow the war path.

They possessed a country, unsurpassed for its various advantages, not only on this continent, but on the globe.—It afforded a soil of the most fruitful kind, where they could, with ease and certainty, always cultivate their maize. Its forests abounded in the deer, elk, bear and other animals, whose flesh supplied their lodges. It was irrigated by some of the sublimest rivers of the continent, whose waters ran south and north, east, and by the Alleghanies, west, till they all found their level, at distant points, either in the Gulfs of St. Lawrence and Mexico, or in the intermediate shores of the Atlantic. Lakes of an amazing size, compared to those of Europe, bounded this territory on the north and north east. Its own bosom, was spotted, with secondary sheets of water, like that of the Cayuga, upon whose banks we are assembled. These added freshness and beauty to the thick, and almost unbroken continuity of these forests.

Nations doubtless owe some of their characteristics to the natural scenes of their country, and if we grant the same influence to the red sons of the forest, they had sources of animating and elevating thoughts around them.—Men who habitually cast their views to the Genesee and the Niagara—who crossed in their light canoe, the Ontario and Erie, wending their way into the sublime vista of the upper lakes: men, who threaded these broad forests in search of the deer, or who descended the powerful and rapid channels of the Alleghany, the Susquehanna, the Delaware and the St. Lawrence, in quest of their foes,

must have felt the influence of magnitude and creative grandeur, and could not but originate ideas favorable to liberty and personal independence. Their very position, became thus the initiatory step in their assent to power.

2. Such was the country occupied, at the era of the discovery, by the Iroquois. They lived, to employ their own symbolic language, in a long lodge extending east and west, from the waters of the Ca-ho-ha-ta-tea^[A] to those of Erie. Their most easterly tribe, the Mohawks, extended their occupancy to a point which they still call, with dialectic variations, Skan-ek-ta-tea, being the present site of Albany. To this place, or, as is more generally thought, to this geographical vicinity, the commercial enterprize of Holland, sent an exploring ship in 1609. Here begins the certain and recorded history of the Iroquois. We have only known them 200 years. All beyond this, is a field of antiquarian inquiry.

From the historical documents recently obtained by the State from France, and deposited in the public offices at the capitol, it is seen that this people are sometimes called the NINE nations of the Iroquois. Algonquin tradition, which I have recently published, denotes that they originally consisted of EIGHT tribes. (ONEOTA.) Whatever of truth or error, there may be in these terms, it is certain that, at the period of the Dutch discovery and settlement referred to, they uniformly described themselves as the FIVE NATIONS, or United People, under the title of AKONOSHIONI.^[B] The term Ongwe Honwee, which Colden mentions as peculiarly applied to themselves, as proudly contradistinguished from others, is a mere equivalent, in the several dialects, at this day, for the term Indian, and applies equally to other tribes, throughout the continent, as well as to themselves. By the admission of the Tuscaroras into the confederacy, they became known as the Six Nations. The principles of their compact, were such as to admit of any extension. They might as well, for aught that is known, have consisted of Sixteen as Six Tribes, and like our own Union, they would have been stronger and firmer in their power, with each admission.

I have directed some few inquiries to their plan of union. It appears to have originated in a proposal to act in concert, by means of a central council, in questions of peace and war. In other respects, each tribe was an independency. It had no right to receive ambassadors from other tribes.—Messages delivered to a frontier tribe, were immediately transmitted to the next tribe in position, and by them passed on, to the central councils. They affirm that these messages were forwarded, with extraordinary celerity, by runners who rested not, night or day. The power to convene the general council, for despatch of public business, was in the presiding or executive chief of the Central Tribe.

This power to make war or peace, or cession of sovereignty, was given up, on the principle of an equal union in all respects, without regard to numbers. It was strictly federative, or a union of tribes. The assent to a measure, was given by tribes. Whether all were required to assent, or a majority was sufficient, is not known. It is believed they *required* entire unanimity.

3. But another principle, of the deepest importance, ran throughout the organization of all the tribes, more remote in its origin, and still more influential, it may be thought, in forming a more perfect union, and giving strength and compactness to the government. It was the plan of the TOTEMIC BOND. This bond was a fraternity of separate clans in each tribe. It was based on original consanguinity, and marked by a heraldic device, as the figure of a quadruped, or bird. This appears to be an ancient feature in their organization, and is also found among other North American tribes. The Algonquin tribes, who possess the same organization, and from whose vocabulary we take the name, call it the Totem. The institution of the totem, or interfraternity of clans, existed, and is also found, with well marked features, among the Iroquois. It had, however, one characteristic, which was peculiar, to these nations.—It was employed to mark the descent of the chiefs, which ran exclusively by the female. The law of marriage, interdicting connexions within the clan, and limiting them to another, was probably established in ancient times, among the other nations who adhere to this institution, but, if so, it has dropped, or dwindled into mere tradition.

Totem, is a term denoting the device, or pictorial sign, which is used by each individual, to determine his family identity. As many as have the same totem are admitted to be of the same family or clan. In this respect, it is analogous to coats of arms. It differs from them in this, that no person can marry another of the same arms and totem. They are related. The reason for keeping up this interdict, in cases where the degree of relationship must often be very small, or is entirely lost, appears to be one of policy, and will be, as far as possible, explained.

Originally, there appears to have been three leading families or clans, among all the North American Indians, whose devices were, respectively, the TURTLE, the WOLF, and the BEAR. This triad of honored clans, existed and still exists among nations diverse in their languages, and remote in position, and may be considered as a proof of their common origin. These totems were regarded as of the highest authority—a fact which may denote either original paternity in these clans, or some distinguished action or services, analogous, perhaps, to the well known events of the Curatii and Horatii.

It is certain, at least, that amongst each of the Iroquois tribes, as well as the great Algonquin family, there existed the totem or clan of the turtle, the wolf, and the bear. I will take, however, as an illustration of the Totemic organization of the tribes, the instance of the NUN-DO-WA-GA, or Senecas. The facts here employed have recently been communicated to me by their distinguished chief DE-O-NE-HO-GA-WA. The tribe consists of eight clans. They are, in the order communicated, the wolf, the turtle, the bear, the beaver, the snipe or plover, the falcon or hawk, the deer and the cranes. The present reigning clan is the wolf, the clan to which the noted orator, Red Jacket, and my informant, both belonged. We may assume, that what appear to have been fundamental principles, were actually so, and are to be regarded as the constitutional basis.

Each clan is entitled to a chief. Each chief has a seat in council. The chiefs are hereditary, counting by the female line. By this law of descent, no chief could beget an immediate successor. And herein consisted one of the marked points of political wisdom in their system. It is this law of descent which best distinguishes it from the system of government of other nations on this continent, and in Asia. No such rule is known to exist, but may exist, among the Mongol race, or other Asiatic stocks, to

whom these people have usually been traced. If so, the law of descent, in this regard, is indigenous and original. What disquisitions have we not seen, that a certain Iroquois chief was in the regular line of the chieftainship, by the father? whereas, it is clear, that the son of a chief could never, in any case, succeed his father. The descent ran, so to say, in the line of the queen-mother. If a chief die, his brother, next in age, would succeed him. These failing, his daughter's male children, if connected with the reigning totem, would succeed. Her children constituted the chain of transmission; but the heir to the chieftainship, whether by acknowledged succession, or by choice in case of dispute or uncertainty, had his claims uniformly submitted to a called council, and if approved, the sachem was regularly installed to the office. Councils had this right from an early day, and are known to have ever been very scrupulous and jealous in its exercise, and continue to be so, at this time.

By the establishment of this law of descent, the evils of a hereditary chieftainship were obviated. And the succession was kept in healthy channels, by the right of the council to decide, in all cases, and to set aside incompetent claimants. This right was so exercised, as to give the nation the advantages of the elective power, and to avail itself of all its talent.

We perceive in this system, an effective provision for breaking dynasties, and securing at each mutation of the chieftainship, a fresh line of chiefs, who were subject to a life limit. Each clan having the same right to one chief, a perpetual, yet constantly changing body of sachems, was kept up, which must necessarily change the body entirely in one generation. Yet, like the classes in our senatorial organization, the change was effected so slowly and gradually, that the body of chiefs constituted a political perpetuity.

In contemplating this system, there is more than one point to admire. History gives us no example of a confederacy in which the principle of political and domestic union, were so intimately bound together. By the establishment of the Totemic Bond, the clans were separated on the principle of near kindred, between which all marriage was inhibited. Every marriage between these separated clans, therefore, bound them closer together, and the consequence soon must have been, their entire amalgamation, had it not been provided, that each clan, through the female line, should preserve inviolate forever, its own Totemic independency. In other words, the female was never so incorporated into a new relation by the matrimonial tie, as to lose her family name, and her mother's ancestral rights. If, for example, a deer totem female, married a wolf or hawk male, she was still counted in the clan of the deer, and never gave up her political rights, to the wolf or hawk clans, which had provided for her a husband. Her position may, perhaps, be better understood, by observing that the married woman, still retained her maiden name—the *virgin* name of her family. By this means she preserved the identity of her clan, and with it, its heraldic and political rights. Not only so, the property of a female, never vested in, or belonged to the husband. This trait is still in full vogue, among each of the tribes. Its operation has been witnessed the present year.

Matrons had also the right to attend and sit in council, and there were occasions, in which they were permitted to speak. For this purpose, a speaker was assigned to them, and this person became a standing officer in the council.—It might pertain to the nations to bring in propositions of peace. Such propositions might prejudice the character of a warrior, but they were appropriate to the female, and the wise men knew how to avail themselves of this stroke of policy. We speak of the general and burdensome subjection of the female, among our Red Men—a condition, indeed, inseparable from the hunter state, but here is a trait of power and consideration, which has not yet been reached by refined nations.

With respect to the cause of descent through the female line, it is believed there are sound and politic reasons for such a custom, in the nomadic state; but we have not time to examine them. The whole subject of the separation of the tribes into a fixed member of original clans; the connexion of these clans, preserved by the totems, and the selection of the female as the preserver of these totemic ties, is one of deep interest, and worthy of your inquiries. So far as the investigation has been carried, it appears, that the primary object of this organization was to preserve the NAMES of the original founders of the nation.—These founders are said to have been the children of two brothers, and were cousin-germans. But why preserve their names? What object was to result from it? Were the persons who bore the names of the wolf, and the turtle and the falcon and other species, famed as hunters or warriors? Had they delivered their people, from imminent peril, or performed any noble act? Had they conducted their people across the sea, from other countries? Did they expect to return, and was *this* the object of preserving their names, in the line of their descendants? Or was the institution, as it does not appear to have been, mere caprice? Nothing could give more interest to your enquiries than a search into these obscure matters. They are, in fact, at the foundation of their system of government, and will enable you, with more clearness, to ascertain and fix its principles.

4. Of this government itself, we know very little, beyond the fact, that it had attained great celebrity among the other tribes. It was evidently founded on the overthrow of that of the ancient Alleghans. It appears to have been full of intricacies, yet simple. A republic, yet embracing aristocratic features. A mere government of opinion; yet fixed, effective, and powerful. It would be well to sift it, by the best lights yet within reach. These are verbal and traditionary. There is little to be had from books.

If we look at the political theory of this government it had traits both peculiar and prescient. Their councils were not constituted, primarily, by elective representation. Yet they secured the chief benefits of it. The chiefs, had a life office, and were incapable of transmitting it to their descendants. The organic council was a representation of tribes, not of members. This aristocratic feature, was balanced and its tendency to absorb authority prevented, by permitting the warriors to sit in these primary councils. In these councils, there was free discussion and full deliberation. But there was no formal vote taken, nor any measure carried by counting persons, or ascertaining a majority or plurality. Tradition declares against any such test. The popular sense appears to have been secured alone by the scope and tenor of the debates. I cannot learn that there ever was any formal expression, equivalent to the modern practice of taking of the sense of the council on a measure. Perhaps something of this kind is to be found in the approbatory response, from which the French are said to have made up the word IROQUOIS.

If the aristocratic feature of life-sachemship, was counteracted by the influence of the warriors in council, at the Council Fire of the Tribes; this feature was shorn still more of its objectionable tendencies in the General or Central Council of the Confederacy. Chiefs attended this national assemblage, as delegates or representatives, although not elected representatives, of their tribes. The number depended on circumstances; and varied with the occasion. They were sent, or went, to deliberate on a specific question, or questions, for which, the tribe was summoned, by the Executive Sachem of the Nation holding the high office of Attotarho,^[C] or Convener of the Council. This central council, headed by this kind of a Presidency, was in fact, more purely democratic in its structure, than the home councils. It consisted essentially of a Congress of Chiefs, having a right as chiefs to attend, or delegated for the purpose, and aided also, by the warriors. It had the character of being a representative national body, delegated for a single session; and of a local body of life chiefs constituting the home sachemry, or a limited senate.

Such I apprehend to have been the structure of the Iroquois government. It was strong, efficient and popular.—It had its fixity in the life tenure of the chiefs and the customs of proceeding. The voice of the warriors constituted a counterbalance, or species of second estate. But practically, whatever the theory, the chief and warriors, acted as one body. They came, generally, to advocate, or announce what had already been decided on, in the body of the tribe.

It is evident, in viewing this scheme of a native federative government, that its tendencies were always in favor of the power of the separate tribes. No people ever existed, who watched more narrowly the existence of power, and its innate tendency to centralize, and usurp. Suspicious to a fault, their eyes and ears were ever open to the least tone or gesture of alarm. They had only confided, to the Central Council, the power to make war or peace, and to regulate public policy. This Central Council, received embassies, not only from the numerous nations with whom they warred; but the delegates of the crowns of France and England, often stood in their presence.

The assent of each tribe is believed to have been requisite to an alliance, or rupture. When this had been given at the central council, it was explained before the local council, and the concurrence of the body of the tribe, was essential to make it binding and effective. In case of war, there was no fixed scale by which men were to be raised. It was deemed obligatory for each tribe to raise men according to its strength. But each was left free to its own action, being responsible for such action, to PUBLIC OPINION. All warriors were volunteers, and were raised for specific expeditions, and were bound no longer. To take up the war club, and join in the war dance, was to enlist. There was no other enlistment—no bounties—no pay—no standing force—no public provisions—no public arms—no clothing—no public hospital. The martial impulse of the people was sufficient. All was left to personal effort and provision. Self dependence was never carried to such height. The thirst for glory—the honor of the confederacy—the strife for personal distinction, filled their ranks; and led them, through desert paths, to the St. Lawrence, the Illinois, the Atlantic seaboard and the southern Alleghanies. Nor did they need the roll of the river to animate their courage, or regulate their steps. Theirs was a high energetic devotion, equal or superior to even that of ancient Sparta and Lacedæmon. They conquered wherever they went. They subdued nations in their immediate vicinity. They exterminated others. They adopted the fragments of subjugated tribes into their confederacy, sunk their national homes into oblivion, and thus repaired the irresistible losses of war. They had eloquence, as well as courage. Their speakers maintained a high rank along side of the best generals and negotiators of France, England and America. We owe this tribute to their valor and talents. One thousand such men, equipped for war as *they* were, and led by *their* spirit, would have effected more in battle, than the tens of thousands of effeminate Aztecs and Peruvians who shouted, but often did no more than *shout*, around the piratical bands of Cortez and Pizarro.

5. I have left myself but little time to speak of the origin and early history of this people—topics which are of deep interest in themselves, but which are involved in great obscurity. They are subjects which commend themselves to your attention, and offer a wide field for your future research. There are three periods in our Indian history:

1. THE ALLEGORIC AND FABULOUS AGE. This includes the creation, the deluge, the creation of Holiness and Evil, and some analogous points, in the general and shadowy traditions of men, which our hunter race, have almost universally concealed under the allegoric figures, of a creative bird or beast, or the exploits of some potent personage, endowed with supernatural courage or power. In this era, the earth was also covered with monsters and giants, who waged war, and drove men into caves and recesses; until the interposition of the original creative power, for their relief.

2. THE ANTE-HISTORICAL PERIOD, in which tradition begins to assume the character of truth, but is still obscured by fable. This period includes the early discoveries by the Northmen, the reputed voyage of Prince Madoc, &c.

3. THE PERIOD OF ACTUAL HISTORY, dating from the earliest voyage of Columbus and his companions.

I have alluded, in a preceding part of this address, to the mode of studying their early history. Where little or nothing is to be obtained from books, it requires a cautious investigation of these traditions and antiquities. Ethnology, in all its branches, has a direct and practical bearing on this subject. The physical type of man, the means of his subsistence, the state of his arts, the language he speaks, the hieroglyphics he carves, the mounds he builds—the fortifications he erects,—his religion, his superstitions, his legendary lore—the very geography of the country he inhabits, are so many direct and palpable means of acquiring historical evidence. It is from the investigation of these, that tribes and nations are grouped and classified, and the original stocks of mankind denoted, and the track of their dispersion over the globe traced. And they constitute so many topics of study and investigation.

In relating their traditions, our Red Men are prone, to connect, (as if these were portions of a continuous and consistent narrative) the most *recent* and most *remote* events, which dwell in their memory. And from their present residence and recent

history, to run back, by a few sentences, into purely fabulous and allegoric periods. Fiction and fact, are mingled in the same strain. In listening to those relations, it is important to establish in the mind, historical periods, and to separate that which is grotesque or imaginative from the narration of real events. The latter, may be sometimes distorted by this juxtaposition, but it is, in general, easy to separate the two, and to re-adopt them, on their own principles. The early nations of Europe and Asia, pursued the same system. Their men were soon traced into gods, and their gods, soon ended in sensualists, or demons. Greek and Roman history, before the period of Herodotus, must have been little better than a jargon of such incongruities, and nearly all the earlier part of it, is no better now. To teach our children these nonsensical fables, is to vitiate their imagination, and the thing would never have been dreamt of, in a moral age, were not the ancient mythology, inseparably mixed up with the present state of ancient history, poetry and letters. We must teach it as a fable, and rely on truth to counteract its effects.

The Iroquois have their full share in the fabulous and allegoric periods, and an examination of their tales and traditions will be found, I apprehend, to give ample scope to poetry and imagination. In their fabulous age, as recorded by Cusick, they have their war, with flying Heads, the Stone Giants, the Great Serpent, the Gigantic Musquito, the Spirit of Witchcraft, and several other eras, which afford curious evidences of the way-farings and wanderings of the human intellect, unaided by letters, or the spirit of truth.

Actual history plants its standard close on the confines of these benighted regions of fable and allegory. It is not proposed to enter into much detail on this topic. The modern facts are pretty well known, but have never been thoroughly investigated or arranged. Of the earlier facts in their origin and history, we know very little. The first writers on the subject of the Indians generally, after the settlement of America, dealt in wild speculations, and were carried away with preconceived theories, which destroy their value. Colden, who directed his attention to the Iroquois, scarcely attempted any thing beyond a specific relation of transactions, which are intended for the information of the Board of Trade and Plantations, and these do not come down beyond the peace of Ryswick. There is a large amount of printed information, adequate for the completion of their history in the 18th and 19th centuries, but most of the works are of rare occurrence, and are only to be found in large libraries at home and abroad. Other facts exist in manuscript official documents, numbers of which, have recently been obtained by the State, from foreign offices, and are now deposited in the Secretary's office at Albany. The lost correspondence on Indian affairs, of Sir William Johnson, may yet come to light, and would necessarily be important. Private manuscripts and the traditions of aged Indians, still living, would further contribute to their history. They are a people worthy the separate pen of a historian, and it may be hoped that an elaborate and full work, may be produced.

Where the Iroquois originated? is a question, which involves the prior and general one, of the origin of the Red Race. So far as relates to their proximate origin, on this continent, I am inclined to think, that it was in the tropical latitudes extending west from the Gulf of Mexico.—Facts indicate the great tide of our migration, to have been from that general race. The *zea maize* which is a southern plant, came from that quarter, and was spread, as the tribes moved from the south to the north, the east, and northeast, and north west. Which of the ancient Indian stocks came first we know not. The Iroquois, if we follow one of their own authors, have strong claims to antiquity, but we cannot accept this in full. That they migrated up the valley of the Mississippi, and the Ohio to its extreme head (they call the Alleghany Oheo) is probable. Our actual knowledge on this subject, historically speaking, is very small, and we must grope our way through dark and shadowy traditions. These, however, sustain the general fact stated, which is helped out by other accessions. That they had crossed the great artery of the continent, (the Mississippi river) prior to the Algonquin race, but after the Alleghans, is shown by the traditions of the latter. [P.W.]^[D] With this race, tradition asserts, that they formed an alliance, at a remote era, and maintained a bloody war, for many years, against the ancient Alleghans, who are supposed, in these wars, to have erected the fortifications and mounds, of the Mississippi valley. That this ancient Alleghanic empire of the West, so to call it, fell before the combined courage and energy of the Iroquois and Algonquins, and that the defeated tribes either retired down the waters of the Mississippi, or were in part incorporated with themselves, or yet exist in the Far West, under other names, we have various traditions for asserting or believing.

Thus far we are speaking of the ante-historical period. When the colonies came to be planted, and our ancestors spread themselves along the Atlantic coast, from the initial points of settlement in Virginia, Nova Belgica, and New England, the Iroquois were already well seated, and spoke and acted, whenever they desired to make allusion to the matter, as if they had been *forever* seated on the soil they then occupied. To conceal the fact of their title being held by right of conquest, or to supply the actual want of history, one tribe, the Oneidas, asserted that they had sprung from a rock. Another, the Wyandots, alleged that they came out of the ground by the fiat of the great spirit. [Oneota.] None of them acknowledged a *foreign origin* beyond seas. None of them acknowledged, at first, that they knew aught of the ancient mound-builders and people who built the old fortifications in the West, or in their own country; but they subsequently connected, or accommodated these mounds, to their war with the Alleghans. This is in accordance with Indian policy, and suspicious foresight. When closely questioned, they told Gov. Clinton that these old works were by an *earlier* people, and that their oldest traditions related to their wars with the Cherokees, and the people of the extreme south. That they originally dwelt in those latitudes—that they migrated north through the Ohio valley, around the Alleghanies, and came into Western New-York from the borders of the Lakes and the St. Lawrence, are points very well denoted by their languages, vestiges of arts, geographical nomenclature and history, so far as we have had the means of recording it.

Cartier, in 1535, found them seated at Hochelaga, the present site of Montreal. They had an ancient station, as low down the Connecticut at least, as Northfield. Towards the north of lakes Ontario and Erie, they extended to the chain of lakes which stretches through from the northern shores of the former to lake Huron. It is seen from Le Jeune, that they ordered the Wyandots of the ancient Hochelaga Canton, who had formed an alliance with the French and with the Algonquins, to quit that

spot, and remove into the territory south of the lakes. And in default of this, they warred against them, and drove them west, through the great chain of lakes to Michilimackinac, and even to the western extremity of lake Superior.

The period of the settlement of Canada, ripened causes of hostility to the entire Algonquin, or as they called them, Adirondak race, into maturity. The Wyandot alliance with the French gave an edge to this contest, and having soon been supplied with guns and ammunition by the Dutch, they defeated this race in several sanguinary battles between Montreal and Quebec, and drove them out of this valley, by the way of the Ontario river, and pursued them to their villages and hunting grounds in area of lakes Huron, Michigan and Algoma. They defeated the Kah Kwahes or Eries. They pushed their war parties, from the lakes, through to the MIAMI, the WABASH, and the ILLINOIS, on the latter of which they were encountered by La Salle and his people, in his early expedition, in the seventeenth century. Their great avenue to the west, the avenue by which, in part at least, they appear to have migrated at an early day, was the Alleghany river, through which, they continued to exercise their ancient or acquired authority in the Ohio valley, and the Alleghanian range.

Back on this route, they continued their war expeditions against the tribes of the southern Alleghanies *at* and, for some time, *after* the era of the first settlement of the country. The point of their hostility, was directed against the Catawbias, the Cherokees, and their allies, the Abiecas, Hutchees and others. Smith encountered them on these wars, in the interior of Virginia, in 1608. And it is well known, that they brought off their brothers, the Tuscaroras, after the settlement of North Carolina, and gave them a location among themselves, and a seat at their council fire, in Western New-York.

Launching their war canoes on the Delaware and the Susquehanna, they extended their sway over the present area of New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland, bringing under their sovereign power, that member of the great Algonic family of America, who call themselves Lenni Lenapees, but who are better known in our history as Delawares. Go which way the traveler will, even at this day, for a thousand miles west, southwest and northwest of their great council fire at Onondaga, and the inquirer will find that the name of a NADOWA, which is the Algonquin term for Iroquois, was a word of terror to the remotest tribes. Writers tell us it was the same throughout New England. By the peaceful and wise policy of the Dutch prior to 1664, and of the English subsequent to that date, this confederacy was kept in our interest; and he must be a careless reader of our history, who does not know, that they formed a perfect wall of defence against the encroachments of the French Crown upon our territories. It was to curb this power, and gain some permanent foot-hold on the soil, that La Salle built fort Niagara in 1678. Vaudruiel, the Governor General of New France, could give no stronger reason to his King, for taking post on the straits of Detroit, and fortifying that point, in 1701, than that it would enable him to "curb the Iroquois." [Oneota.]

But, I do not stand before you to enter into a critical history of the Iroquois' powers. Who has not heard of their fame and prowess—of their indomitable courage in war,—of their admirable policy in peace: of their eloquence in council: of the noble fire of patriotic independence, which led them to defend the integrity of their soil against all invaders; and of the triumphs they achieved, throughout ABORIGINAL AMERICA, by the wisdom of their principles of confederation. The history of their rise and early progress, we shall probably never satisfactorily know. It is said by early writers, that the origin of their confederation was not very remote. But so much as we know of them—so much of their career as has passed while we have been their neighbors, proves that they had well established claims to antiquity—that they were a free, bold and valorous stock of the human race—that they had thought to plan, language to express, and energy to execute.—Compared to other races north of the tropics, there were two principles, apparent in their history, which give them the palm, as statesmen and warriors, although in some other departments of intellectual attainment, they were probably excelled by certain of the Algonquins. I allude to the principles of political union; and the wise and humane policy, which led them to adopt, into their body, the remnants of the nations whom they conquered. Here were two elements of political power, in which they were not only a century in advance of *all* the other stocks of the north; but they were in advance of the most prominent examples of the semi-civilized Indian tribes of *this* day.—Neither the Choctaws, the Cherokees, or other expatriated tribes now assembled on the Neosho territory, west of the Mississippi, although they adopted governments for themselves, have had the wisdom to adopt a general union.—The worst and most discouraging fact to the friends of the aboriginal race, in these Tribes, is, that they will not confederate. Discord, internal and external, has assailed them with great power, in late years, and threaten even to defeat the humane policy of the government, in their colonization.

So superior were the Iroquois, in this particular, so deeply imbued were their minds with the wisdom of union; that had the discovery of the continent, been postponed half a century longer, they would have presented a compact representative empire in North America, far more stable, energetic and sound, if not so brilliant as that of Mexico. They were a people of physically better nerve and mould. Of ample stature and great personal activity and courage, they were capable of offering a more efficient resistance to their invaders. The climate itself was more favorable to energetic action; and it can scarcely be deemed fanciful to assert, that had Hernando Cortez, in 1519, entered the Mohawk Valley, instead of that of Mexico, with the force he actually had, his ranks would have gone down under the skillfulness of the Iroquois' ambuscades, and himself perished ingloriously at the stake.

The number of warriors they could bring into the field, was large, although it has probably been over-rated. Let it not be overlooked, in estimating the ancient vigor and military power of this race, that in 1677, one year after the *final* transfer of political power, in New-York, from the Stadtholder of Holland to the British crown, the Iroquois wielded more than 2000 hatchets. [Clint's Dis. N. Y. Col. Vol. 2, p. 80.] Sixteen hundred of these warriors, are estimated to have ranged themselves on the side of Great Britain, in the memorable contest of the Revolution.

Misled in this contest, they certainly were—doubting long which of two branches of the same white race, they should side with, but overpowered by external pomp, by specious promises, and by false appearances, they committed a fatal mistake. They fought, in fact, against the very principles of republican confederation, which they had so long upheld in their own body,

and which, I may add, had so long upheld them. They perilled all upon the issue; and the issue went against them. Their great and eloquent leader Thayendanagea, better known as Joseph Brant, had been educated in British schools, he could speak two tongues, and his counsels prevailed. He was not in the old line of the chieftainship, but had placed himself at the head of the confederacy by his brilliant talents, and by favorable circumstances. That line fell with the great Mohawk sachem Hendrick, at the battle of lake George, in 1755, and with the wise civilian Little Abraham, who in right of his mother, succeeded him, and died at his Castle at Dionderoga. Brant was, however, a man of great energy of character, of shrewd principles of policy, and of great personal, as well as moral courage. As a war captain and a civil leader, the Red Race of America has produced no superior. He led 1580 tomahawks against the armies of the Revolution—at his war cry 15,000 arrows were launched from their fatal bows. The voice of Kirkland—the voice of Schuyler—the voice of Washington were exerted in vain. Had he hearkened to these friendly voices, the Iroquois confederacy would now have stood in the plenitude of power, and we should not have assembled to-day to light the fires of this Young Institution from its dying embers.

These things are past. The contest of the revolution was one, which our fathers waged. Many of you may have heard the graphic recitals of those days of peril, as I have, from the lips of actors, who now rest from their toils.—They were days of high and sanguinary import. The deeds of daring which they brought forth, came like a mighty tempest over the face of this fair land. It prostrated many a noble trunk. It swept for seven long years, over the beauteous lakes and forests, which now constitute our homes. It left them almost denuded and desolate. But the mild airs and gentle summer winds of peace succeeded. The hoarse voice of the Iroquois, O-WAY-NE-O, has been transformed into the soft and silver tones of God. Flowers and fruits, and fields of waving grain, soon rose up in every valley, and shed their fragrance along every sylvan shore. Joy and prosperity succeeded the arrowy storm of war. And it has been given to us, to carry out scenes of improvement, and of moral and intellectual progress, which providence, in its profound workings, has deemed it best for the prosperity of man, that we, and not *they*, should be entrusted with. We have succeeded to their inheritance: but we regard them as brothers. We cherish their memory: we admire their virtues; and we aim to rescue from oblivion their noble deeds.

I have merely alluded to the importance of the Iroquois decision at the critical period, 1776. The erroneous policy they adopted, with some exceptions, is among the events of past times, which wiser and more learned and resplendent nations, than they professed to be, have committed. We regret the error of the decision, but we hold fellowship with the man. He is our brother; and we meet this day to consecrate a literary institution in the land, more enduring, we trust, than deeds of strife and battle, and better suited to elicit studies to exalt the heart and dignify the understanding. Your weapons are not spears and clubs, but letters. Your means are the quiet and peaceful paths of inquiry. If these paths are often obscured by the foot of time and tangled by the interlacings of history and antiquity, be it yours to put the branches aside, and lead the right way. Truth is your aim, and justice and benevolence your guides. They hold before you the lamp of science so clearly, that you cannot mistake your way. While you essay, with modesty and diligence to tread in this path, and render justice to a proud and noble branch of the aboriginal race, your ultimate ends are moral improvement, the accumulation of useful facts, and the general advancement of historical letters.

You have selected, out of a wide field of aboriginal nations, the history and ethnography of the Iroquois, as the theme of your particular inquiries. To us, at least, these Tribes, stand in the most interesting relations. They occupied our soil; they gave names to our rivers and mountains. They figure in the foreground of our history. The very names of the minor streams and lakes we dwell beside, bring up, by association, the free and bold race, who once claimed them as their patrimony. Before Columbus set out, on his solitary mule, to solicit the patronage of Ferdinand and Isabella, they were here. Before Hudson dropped anchor north of the, to him, wonderful peaks of the Ontiora, or Highlands, they were here. Other Indian races have left their names on other portions of the continent. The names of the Missouri and Mississippi, the Alleghany and the Oregon, we trace to other stocks of red men. But the Akonoshioni, or Iroquois, has consecrated the early history of Western New-York. Their history is, to some extent, our history; and we turn, with intellectual refreshment from the thread-bare themes of Europe and the Europeans, to trace the humble sepulchres where the Iroquois buried his dead—the mounds, which entombed his rulers or his battle slain,—or lifted on high, his sacrificial lights—the long and half obliterated trenches of embankments which encompassed his ancient towns—the heaps of stone that lie at the angles and sally ports of his simple fortresses, on the circular trenches, which enclosed his beacon fires on the mountain tops. It is in localities of this kind, that the ploughman turns up fragments of the Red Man's time wasted and broken pottery—his stone pestles, his carved pipes, and his skilfully chipped arrow heads, and spear heads, and tomahawks of stone. These, and analogous remains, are the objects of our antiquarian researches. Prouder monuments he had none. There was neither column, nor arch, statue nor inscription. But we may trace, by a careful inspection of the objects, the state and progress of his ancient and rude arts. We may denote, by their occurrence, in the same localities, the era of the arrival of the white man. We may establish other eras, from geological changes,—the growth of forest trees, and other inductive means.

There are three eras in American antiquity.

1. Vestiges of their primary migration and origin.
2. Vestiges of their internal changes and intestine wars, prior to the discovery of the continent by Columbus.
3. Evidences of wars, migrations and remains of occupancy, subsequent to the arrival of Europeans.

These are to be studied in the inverse order of their being stated. We must proceed from the known to the unknown—from the recent, to the remote.

Ethnography offers a species of proof, to determine the migrations and divisions in the original family of man, which is to be drawn from geographical considerations—the relative position of islands, seas and continents—the means of subsistence as

governed and limited by climate, and soil; the state of ancient arts, agriculture, languages, &c.

Philology denotes the affinities of nations, by the analogies of words, and forms of syntax, and the place of expressing ideas.

The remains of arts, monuments, inscriptions, hieroglyphics, picture writing, and architecture, constitute so many means of comparing one nation with another, and thus determining their affinities; and although most of our aboriginal nations had made but little progress in these departments, the state of ruins in Mexico, Central Mexico and Yucatan; the mounds and fortifications of the West; and even the remains of forts and barrows in Western New-York, entitle them to consideration.

There is another department of observation on our aborigines, which, from the light it has shed on the mental characteristics of the Algonquian, and some other stocks, offers a new field for investigation. I allude to the subject of the imaginative legends and tales of the Red Race. Such tales have been found abundantly in the lodge circles of the tribes about the Upper Lakes and the source of the Mississippi. They reveal the sources of many of their peculiar opinions on life, death, and immortality, and open, if I may so say, a vista to the philosophy of the Indian mind, and the theory of his religion.

An ample field for investigation is thus before you. And it is one full of attractions alike for the man of science, research, learned leisure and philosophy. But it is not alone to these, that the Red man and his associations, present a field for study and contemplation. His history and existence on this continent, is blended with the richest sources of poetry and imagination. His beautiful and sonorous geographical nomenclature alone, has clothed our hills and lakes and streams, with the charms of poetic numbers.—The Red man himself, who once roved these attractive scenes, with his bow and arrows, and his brow crowned with the highest honors of the war path and the chase, was a being of NOBLE MOULD. He felt the true sentiment of independence. He was capable of high deeds of courage, disinterestedness and virtue. His generosity and hospitality were unbounded. His constancy in professed friendship was universal, and his memory of a good deed, done to him, or his kindred, never faded. His breast was animated with a noble thirst of fame. To acquire this, he trod the war path, he submitted to long and severe privations. Neither fatigue, hunger or thirst were permitted to gain the mastery over him. A stoic in endurance he was above complaint, and when a prisoner at the stake, he triumphed over his enemy in his death song. The history of such a people must be full of deep tragic and poetic incidents; and their antiquities, cannot fail to illustrate it.—The tomb that holds a man, derives all its moral interest *from* the man, and would be destitute of it, without him. America is the tomb of the Red man.

A single objection, to the plan of the institution, remains to be answered. It may be deemed too intricate and complex to secure unity in action. The inquiries are admitted to be interesting and capable of furnishing intellectual aliment for a literary society; but why not establish it on plain principles, in the ordinary mode? All that is sought, it may be said, could be accomplished without such a weight of associated machinery. By organizing it on the basis of the several tribes, and the several clans of each tribe; spreading over so wide an area of territory, and adopting so many of the aboriginal peculiarities, in terms, form of admission, and you have exposed the institution to serious objections, and to the danger of an early decline. But, are not these traits, rather the guarantees of its success and perpetuity? It addresses itself, particularly to the YOUNG. To them, it brings the attractions of novelty. Much of the ardor of association and desire of action, peculiar to this age, may find its gratification in these co-fraternal, and ceremonial observances; and be supposed to act as stimulants to the higher, and ulterior objects of the association. These objects are, both in their nature, and associations, of an inspiring cast. They bring before you, a new world, with its ancient inhabitants, as themes of contemplation. And these themes spring up, with a freshness and vigor, well suited to attract the pen and pencil.—Tired with poring over the dusty volumes, which detail the ruins of the temples and cities of the eastern hemisphere, the spirit of research asks, whether, in the very magnificence of the continent, there be not now a temple, whose history is worth study? Cloyed with the accounts handed down of the renowned places and renowned men of antiquity, it is inquired, whether these broad forests and far-spread vistas of woods and waters, do not conceal something of the foot-prints of past time, which is worth labor and learning to investigate, and reveal?

Nature is found here, in some of her sublimest moods. She is still in her questive youth, but it is a youth of gigantic proportions. Her largest rivers occupy thousands of miles in displaying their winding channels, between these sources and their outlets, in the sea. Her broad forests still wave with their leafy honors unshorn. Her lakes occupy a length and breadth and depth, which give them far more the aspect of seas. Ships, bear a heavy commerce on their bosoms, and navies have battled for supremacy upon their ample breasts. It is a region destined for the human race to develop itself and expand in. It is a seat prepared for the re-union of the different stocks of mankind. It is an area of magnificent extent. Higher mountains fill other parts of the world, and other parts of *this* continent. The Alps, the Atlas, the Andes and the Cordilleras reach into the skies, but they encumber the earth with their vast proportions, and render the surface sterile. They take away from the area of tillable soil, and add it to waste and unprofitable districts. If our greatest elevations, are humble compared to these, they are clothed with verdure, and break into countless valleys, which afford a habitation to man. No country on the globe abounds with so many beautiful lakes of every size, and our rivers display a succession of cataracts and falls, alike attractive to the eye of taste and art.

Is all this profusion designed to employ the pens of naturalists and statesmen only? Is there no field in the mighty past, for the philosopher and the historian? for the ethnologist and the antiquarian? Is civilized man alone the only object, wanting in the consideration of its former history? We answer, no. Centuries on centuries have passed away, since first the Red man planted his foot on this continent. The very paucity of his knowledge and simplicity of his arts, tell a story of great antiquity. The diversities of language answer to the same end. And, for aught that is known, long before the eras of Socrates and Pythagoras, Plato and Confucius, the Mongol and the Persian. The Tartar and the Mesopotamian, the Chinese and Japanese, and we know not how many other shades of the Red man of Asia, were in AWONEO^[E] or America. Of their wonderful histories and wars and overturnings, by land and sea, of their mixtures and intermixtures of blood and language and lineage and nationality, we know little, or nothing. But, after all the centuries of separation, we find in his physiological

characteristics and conformation of visage and expression, the same Asiatic type of man—whom the first adventurers to these shores, did not hesitate to pronounce the man of India. Use, has perpetuated the term, and if the discoveries of geography, have, ages since, shown the appellation of Indians, in the sense then employed, to be incorrect, physiologists and ethnographers, have but found stronger and stronger proofs, that Asia, in preference to every other quarter of the globe, was the true land of his origin.

FOOTNOTES:

- [A] Hudson.
- [B] Or Ho-de-no-son-ne.
- [C] The corresponding word in the Seneca dialect is Tod-o-dah-hoh.
- [D] Indian Picture Writing.
- [E] Onondaga.

PREFACE.

In Indian mythology may be found the richest poetic materials. An American Author is unworthy of the land that gave him birth if he passes by with indifference this well-spring of inspiration, sending liberally forth a thousand enchanted streams. It has given spiritual inhabitants to our valleys, rivers, hills and inland seas; it has peopled the dim and awful depths of our forests with spectres, and, by the power of association, given our scenery a charm that will make it attractive forever. The material eye is gratified by a passing glimpse of nature's external features, but a beauty, unseen, unknown before, invests them if linked to stories of the past, in the creation of which fabling fancy has been a diligent co-worker with memory.

The red man was a being who delighted in the mystical and the wild—it was a part of his woodland inheritance. Good and evil genii performed for him their allotted tasks. Joyous tidings, freedom from disease and disaster—success in the chase, and on the war path were traceable to the Master of Life and his subordinate ministers:—blight that fell upon the corn was attributed, on the contrary, to demoniac agency, and the shaft that missed its mark was turned aside by the invisible hand of some mischievous sprite. Deities presided over the elements. The Chippewas have their little wild men of the woods, that remind us of Puck and his frolicsome brotherhood, and the dark son of the wilderness, like our first parents

—"from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket often heard
Celestial voices."

My tent is pitched on the hunting grounds of the Senecas, (or So-non-ton-ons) and I deem it not inappropriate to select for my theme the Legend of their origin.

Different versions of the story are in circulation, but I have been guided mainly, in the narrative part of my poem, by notes taken down after an interview with the late Captain Horatio Jones, the Indian Interpreter of the Six Nations.

The great hill at the head of Canandaigua Lake, from whence the Senecas sprung, is called Genundewah. Tradition says that it was crowned by a fort to which the braves of the tribe resorted at night-fall, after waging war with a race of giants. These giants were worshippers of Ut-co, or the Evil Spirit, who sent, after their extermination, a great serpent to destroy the conquerors. Quitting its watery lair in Canandaigua Lake, the monster encircled their fortification. The head and tail completed a horrid *ring* at the gateway, and, when half famished, the wretched inmates vainly attempted to escape. All were destroyed with the exception of a pair, whose miraculous preservation is related in the poem that follows. Ever after Genundewah was a chosen seat of Iroquois Council, and wrinkled seers were in the habit of climbing its sides for the purpose of offering up prayers to the Great Spirit.

GENUNDEWAH, [A LEGEND OF CANANDAIGUA LAKE.]

BY WILLIAM H. C. HOSMER.

WRITTEN AT THE REQUEST OF THE "NEW CONFEDERATION OF THE IROQUOIS," AND PRONOUNCED BEFORE THEM IN GENERAL COUNCIL, AT AURORA,
AUGUST 15th, 1845.

I.

Why, Chieftain, linger on this barren hill
That overbrows yon azure sheet below?
Red sunset glimmers on the leaping rill,
Dark night is near, and we have far to go.
This scene—replied he leaning on big bow—
Is hallowed by tradition—wondrous birth
Here to my Tribe was given long ago;
We stand where rose they from departing earth
To light a deathless blaze on Fame's unmouldering hearth.

II.

A fort they reared upon this summit bleak
Guided by counsel from the Spirit Land,
And clad in dart-proof panoply would seek
The plains beneath each morn, a valiant band,
And warfare wage with giants hand to hand:
They conquered in the struggle, and the bones
Of their dead foemen on the echoing strand
Of the clear lake lay blent with wave-washed stones,
And pale, unbodied ghosts filled air with hollow moans.

III.

Ut-co, the scowling King of Evil, heard
The voice of lamentation, and wild ire
The depths of his remorseless bosom stirr'd;
Of that gigantic brood he was the sire,
And flying from his cavern, arched with fire,
He hovered o'er these, waters—at his call
Up rushed a hideous monster, spire on spire;—
Call so astounding that the rocky wall
Of this blue chain of hills seemed tott'ring to its fall!

IV.

With his infernal parent for a guide,
The hungry serpent left his watery lair,
Dragging his scaly terrors up the side
Of this tall hill, now desolate and bare:
Filled with alarm the Senecas espied
His dread approach, and launched a whizzing shower
Of arrows on the foe, whose iron hide
Repelled their flinty points—and in that hour
The boldest warrior fled from strife with fiendish power.

V.

The loathsome messenger of wo and death

True to his dark and awful mission wound,
Polluting air with his envenom'd breath,
Huge folds the palisadoed camp around:
Crouched at his master's feet the faithful hound,
And raised a piteous and despairing cry;
No outlet of escape the mother found
For her imploring infants, and on high
Lifted her trembling hands in voiceless agony.

VI.

Forming a hideous circle at the gate
The reptile's head and tail together lay;
Distended were the fang-set jaws in wait
For victims, thus beleaguered, night and day;
And not unlike the red and angry ray
Shot by the bearded comet was the light
Of his unslumbering eye that watched for prey;
His burnished mail flashed back the sunshine bright,
And round him pale the woods grew with untimely blight.

VII.

When famine raged within their guarded hold,
And wan distemper thinn'd their numbers fast,
Crowding the narrow gateway young and old
With the fixed look of desperation passed
From life to dreadful death—a charnel vast—
The reptile's yawning throat entombed the strong,
And lovely of the Tribe:—remained at last
Two lovers only of that mighty throng
To chaunt with feeble voice a nation's funeral song.

VIII.

Comely to look on was the youthful pair:—
One, like the mountain pine erect and tall,
Was of imposing presence;—his dark hair
Had caught its hue from night's descending pall;
Light was his tread—his port majestic,
And well his kingly brow became a form
Of matchless beauty:—like the rise and fall
Of a strong billow in the hour of storm
Beat his undaunted heart with glory's impulse warm.

IX.

Graced was his belt by beads of dazzling sheen
And painted quills—the handiwork of one
Dearer than life to him;—though he had seen
From the gray hills, beneath a wasting sun,
Only the snows of twenty winters run,
The warrior's right his scalp lock to adorn
With eagle plumes in battle he had won:
O'erjoyed were prophets old when he was born,
And hailed him with one voice "*First Sunbeam of the Morn.*"

X.

The other!—what of her?—bright shapes beyond
This darkened earth wear looks like those she wore;
Graceful her mien as lilly of the pond

That nods to every wind that passes o'er
Its fragrant head a welcome:—never more
By loveliness so rare will earth be blest;
Softer than ripple breaking on the shore
By moonlight was her voice, and in her breast
Pure thought a dwelling found—the Bird of Love a nest.

XI.

Round her would hop unscared the sinless bird,
And court the lustre of her gentle glance,
Hushing each wood-note wild whene'er it heard
Her song of joy:—her countenance
Inspired beholders with a thought that chance
Had borne her hither from some better land:—
To deck her tresses for the festive dance
Girls of the tribe would bring, with liberal hand,
Blossoms and rose-lipped shells from bower and reedy strand.

XII.

A thing of beauty is the slender vine
That wreaths its verdant arm around the oak
As if it there could safely intertwine
Shielded from ringing axe—the lightning stroke—
And like that vine the girl of whom I spoke
Clung to her companion:—scalding tears
Rained from her elk-like eyes, and sobs outbroke
From her o'er-labored bosom, while her ears
Were filled with soothing tones that did not hush her fears.

XIII.

Mourner! the hour of rescue is at hand!
This hill will tremble to its rocky base
When Ou-wee ne-you utters stern command;
Joy ere another fleeting moon the trace
Of clouding sorrow from thy brow will chase:—
Fear not!—for I am left to guard thee yet
Last of the daughters of a luckless race!
We must not in the time of grief forget
That light breaks forth anew from orbs that darkly set.

XIV.

Thus, day by day, would O-wen-do-skah strive
To cheer the drooping spirits of the maid,
And keep one glimmering spark of hope alive;
In the deep midnight for celestial aid,
While cowered the trembler at his knee, he prayed
In tones that might have touched a heart of rock:
One morn exclaimed he—"be no more afraid
Bright, peerless scion of a broken stock,
For Heaven the monster's coil is arming to unlock.

XV.

"Reserved for some high destiny despite
The downfall of our people we live on—
My dreams were of deliverance last night,
And peril of impending death withdrawn:
A light, my weeping one, begins to dawn

On the thick gloom by sorrow round us cast;
The lead-like pressure of despair is gone,
And rides a viewless courier on the blast
Who whispers—Lo! the hour of vengeance comes at last.

XVI.

"Gorged with his meal of gore unstirring sleeps
In his tremendous ring our mortal foe:
Film-veiled his savage eye no longer keeps
Grim watch for victims—warily and slow!
Follow thy lover arrived with bended bow
Of timber shaped, in many a battle tried—
Some guardian spirit will before me throw
A shield by human vision undescried
Should he awake in wrath, and hence our footsteps guide."

XVII.

It was I ween a sight to freeze each vein
That courses through our perishable clay
When sallied forth with muffled tread the twain;
A look of wild, unutterable dismay
Convulsed Te-yos-yu's ^[F]visage while the way,
A spear-length in advance, her lover led:
Reaching the portal paused he to survey
The dangerous pass through which a grisly head
Deprest to earth he saw, its mouth with murder red.

XVIII.

"On! On!"—he whispered—"and the sightless mole
Our footfall must not hear, or we are lost."
Nerved to high purpose was his war-like soul
As the dark threshold of the gate he cross'd;
But fear that instant chilled his limbs with frost,
For high its swollen neck the monster raised
Gore dripping from its jaws with foam embossed,
And rimmed with fire, and circling eye-ball blazed
As light unwounding dart its horrid armor grazed.

XIX.

Sick by a foul and fetid odor made
Recoiled the champion from unequal fray;
Cut off all hope of rescue, he surveyed
Fiercely the danger like a stag at bay:
Where was Te-yos-yu?—she had swooned away,
And hoof-crushed wild-flower of the forest brown
Resembled her as soiled with mould she lay;
Long on the *seeming corpse* the chief looked down,
For 'twas a sight the cup of his despair to crown.

XX.

Kneeling at length, upheld he with strong arm
Her beauteous head, but in the temples beat
No pulse of life:—tears gushing fast and warm
Refresh a heart, of transient ill the seat,
As raindrops cool the summer's midday heat;
But when descends some desolating blow
That makes this world a desert, how unmeet

Is outward symbol!—and far, far below
The water-mark of grief was Oh-wen-do-skah's wo!

XXI.

In broken tones he murmured—"must the name
Of a great people be revived no more,
And like an echo pass away their fame,
Or moccasin's faint impress on the shore
Of the salt lake when billows foam and roar?
Black night enwraps my soul, for she is dead
Who was its light—desire to live is o'er!"
Scarce were these words in mournful accent said,
When peals of thunder shook low vale and mountain-head.

XXII.

Up sprang the Chief;—and on a throne of cloud,
Robed in a snowy mantle fringed with light,
The Lord of life beheld:—the forest bowed
Its head in awe before that presence bright,
And a wild shudder at the dazzling sight
Ran through the mighty monster's knotted ring
Shaking the hill from base to rocky height;
Rose from her trance the maid with fawn-like spring,
And balanced in mid-air the bird on trembling wing.

XXIII.

"Notch on the twisted sinew of thy bow
This fatal weapon"—Ou-wee-ne-you ^[G] cried,
Dropping a golden shaft—"and pierce the foe
Under the rounded scale that wall his side!"
Then vanished, while again the valley wide
And mountain quaked with thunder:—from the ground
The warrior raised the gift of Heaven, and hied
On his heroic mission while around
The hill with closer clasp his train the serpent wound.

XXIV.

Flame-hued and hissing played its nimble tongue
Between thick, ghastly rows of pointed bone
Round which commingled gore and venom clung:
Raging its flattened head like copper shone,
And flinty earth returned a heavy groan
Lashed by quick strokes of its resounding tail;
Heard is like uproar when the hills bleak cone
Is wildly beat by winter's icy flail,
But in that moment dire the archer did not quail.

XXV.

Firm in one hand his trusty bow he held,
And with the other to its glittering head
Drew the long shaft while full each muscle swell'd;
A twanging sound!—and on its errand sped
The messenger of vengeance:—warm and red
Gushed from a gaping wound the vital tide—
Wrenched was the granite from its ancient bed,
And pines were broken in their leafy pride,
When throes of mortal pain the monster's coil untied.

XXVI.

Down the steep hill outstretched and dead he rolled
 Disgorging human heads in his descent;
 Oaks that in earth had deeply fixed their hold
 Like reeds by that revolving mass were bent,
 Splintered their boughs as if by thunder rent:
 High flung the troubled lake its glittering spray,
 And far the beach with flakes of foam besprent,
 When the huge carcass disappeared for aye
 In depths from whence it rose to curse the beams of day.

XXVII.

When winds its murmuring bosom cease to wake
 Through bright transparent waves you may discern
 On the hard, pebbled bottom of the lake
 Skulls changed to stone:—when fires no longer burn
 Kindled by sunset, and the glistening urn
 Of night o'erflows with dew the phantoms pale
 Of matron, maid, child, seer and chieftain stern
 Their ghastly faces to the moon unveil,
 And raise upon the shore a low heart-broken wail.

XXVIII.

The lovers of Genundewah were blest
 By the Great Spirit, and their lodge became
 The nursery of a nation:—when the West
 Opened its gates of parti-colored flame
 To give their souls free passage loud acclaim
 Rang through the Spirit Land, and voices cried
 "Welcome! ye builders of eternal fame!
 Ye royal founders of an empire wide
 The stream of joy flows by, quaff ever from its tide!"

XXIX.

At Onondaga burned the sacred fire
 A thousand winters with unwasting blaze;
 In guarding it son emulated sire,
 And far abroad were flung its dazzling rays:
 Followed were happy years by evil days—
 Blue-eyed and pale came Children of the Dawn
 Tall spires on site of bark-built town to raise;
 Change groves of beauty to a naked lawn,
 And whirl their chariot wheels where led the doe her fawn.

XXX.

Where are the mighty?—morning finds them not!
 I call—and echo gives response alone;
 The fiery bolt of Ruin hath been shot,
 The blow is struck—the winds of death have blown!
 Cold are the hearths—their altars overthrown:
 For them with smoking venison the board,
 Reward of toilsome chase, no more will groan;
 Sharper than hatchet proved the conqueror's sword,
 And blood, in fruitless strife, like water they outpoured.

XXXI.

The spotted Demon of Contagion came
 Ere the sacred bird of Peace could find a nest,
 And vanished Tribes like summer grass when flame
 Reddens the level prairie of the West,
 Or wasting dew drops when the rocky crest
 Of this enchanted hill is tipped with gold;
 And ere the Genii of the wild-wood drest
 With flowers and moss the grave mound's hollowed mould,
 Before the ringing axe went down the forest old.

XXXII.

Oh! where is Gar-an-gu-la—Sachem wise?
 Who was the father of his people?—where
 King Hendrick, Cay-en-guac-to?—*who replies?*
 And Sken-an-do-ah, was thy silver hair
 Brought to the dust in sorrow and despair
 By pale oppression, though thy bow was strong
 To guard their Thirteen Fires?—they did not spare
 E'en thee, old chieftain, and thy tuneful tongue
 The death-dirge of thy race in measured cadence sung.

XXXIII.

Thea-an-de-nea-gua^[H] of the martial brow,
 Gy-ant-wa,^[I] Hon-ne-ya-was^[J] where are they?
 Sa-go-ye-wat-hah!^[K] is *he silent* now?
 No more will listening throngs his voice obey.
 Like visions have the mighty passed away!
 Their tears descend in rain-drops, and their sighs
 Are heard in wailing winds when evening gray
 Shadows the landscape, and their mournful eyes
 Gleam in the misty light of moon-illumin'd skies.

XXXIV.

Gone are my tribesmen, and another race,
Born of the foam, disclose with plough and spade
 Secrets of battle-field and burial-place;
 And hunting grounds, once dark with pleasant shade,
 Bask in the golden light:—but I have made
 A pilgrimage from far to look once more
 On scenes through which in childhood's hour I strayed,
 Though robbed of might my limbs, my locks all hoar,
 And on this Holy Mount mourn for the days of yore,

XXXV.

Our house is broken open at both ends
 Though deeply set the posts, its timber strong—
 From ruthless foes, and traitors masked as friends,
 Tutored to sing a false but pleasant song
 The Seneca and Mohawk guarded long
 Its blood-stained doors:—the *former* faced the sun
 In his decline—the *latter* watched a throng
 Clouding the eastern hills—their tasks are done;
 A game for life was played, and prize the white man won.

XXXVI.

Around me soon will bloom unfading flowers

Ye glorious Spirit Islands of the just!
No fatal axe will hew away your bowers,
Or lay the green-robed forest king in dust:
Far from the spoiler's fury, and his lust
Of boundless power will I my fathers meet
Tiaras wearing never dimm'd by rust,
And they, while airs waft music passing sweet,
To blest abodes will guide my silver-sandal'd feet.

NOTES.

*The warrior's right his scalp lock to adorn
With eagle plumes in battle he had won.*—[STANZA IX.](#)

No one but a brave who has slain an enemy in battle, is allowed the distinguished honor of wearing eagle feathers.

Rained from her elk-like eyes.—[STANZA XII.](#)

Objects clear and bright are often compared by the Indian to the elk's eye. The definition of Muskingum is—"clear as an elk's eye."

Born of the foam.—[STANZA XXXIV.](#)

The red man believes that the whites sprang from the foam of the salt water.

FOOTNOTES:

- [F] Bright eye.
- [G] Great Spirit.
- [H] Brunt.
- [I] Corn Planter.
- [J] Farmer's Brother.
- [K] Red Jacket.

Transcriber's Note:

Inconsistent capitalization (e.g. Gulf vs. gulf), spacing (e.g. north east vs. northeast), and hyphenation (e.g. foot-prints vs. footprints) have been left as in the original.

The following changes were made to the text:

- [p. 5:](#) wory to worthy (worthy of the thought and care)
- [p. 6:](#) exprees to expresses (expresses the peculiarities of its own soil)
- [p. 6:](#) Tueton to Teuton (the Teuton, Goth and Magyar)
- [p. 6:](#) maze to maize (crushed their maize)
- [p. 7:](#) Ninevah to Nineveh (buried sites of Nineveh)
- [p. 7:](#) deciples to disciples (disciples of Zoroaster)
- [p. 8:](#) progres to progress (progress of nations)
- [p. 9:](#) Alleghany's to Alleghanies (by the Alleghanies)
- [p. 9:](#) distatant to distant (at distant points)
- [p. 10:](#) Susquehannah to Susquehanna (the Susquehanna, the Delaware and the St. Lawrence)
- [p. 11:](#) acient to ancient (an ancient feature)
- [p. 13:](#) entitled to entitled (Each clan is entitled to a chief.)
- [p. 14:](#) heriditary to hereditary (a hereditary chieftainship)
- [p. 16:](#) eminent to imminent (from imminent peril)
- [p. 20:](#) Heredotus to Herodotus (the period of Herodotus)
- [p. 24:](#) amunition to ammunition (guns and ammunition)
- [p. 25:](#) Iroquois' to Iroquois' (the Iroquois' powers)
- [p. 25:](#) Vandruiel to Vaudruiel (Vaudruiel, the Governor General of New France)
- [p. 28:](#) beautious to beauteous (beauteous lakes and forests)
- [p. 29:](#) resplendant to resplendent (more learned and resplendent nations)
- [p. 30:](#) obliterated to obliterated (half obliterated trenches)
- [p. 31:](#) subsistance to subsistence (means of subsistence)
- [p. 33:](#) alterior to ulterior (ulterior objects)
- [p. 33:](#) pouring to poring (poring over the dusty volumes)
- [p. 34:](#) vallies to valleys (countless valleys)
- [p. 34:](#) centures to centuries (Centuries on centuries)
- [p. 43:](#) muffled to muffled (with muffled tread)
- [p. 44:](#) is to in (head in awe)
- [p. 44:](#) hilll to hill (Shaking the hill)
- [p. 44:](#) single quotes to double quotes ("Notch on ... fatal weapon")
- [p. 44:](#) side"! to side!" (that wall his side!")
- [p. 46:](#) missing close quote added (quaff ever from its tide!")
- [p. 48:](#) worn to won, and period at end of first line removed to match quoted passage in poem (Note for STANZA IX.)
- [p. 48:](#) missing period added (STANZA XXXIV.)

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